

MEDIA STATEMENT

23 August 2019

Unisa statement on concerns raised about its promotion criteria for academics

The University of South Africa (Unisa) has taken note of concerns raised by some stakeholders on social media and mainstream media platforms pertaining to its promotion criteria for academics. The university wishes to clarify its position on the matter as follows:

Over the years the university has been challenged by disparities in the promotions of staff which, in spite of our efforts to regularise, were influenced by racial factors and which contributed to disharmony amongst the staff. This was confirmed by the assessment conducted by the Department of Labour, in terms of Section 43 of the Employment Equity Act (Report on the Director General Review conducted in terms of Section 43 of the EE Act 55, of 1998, as amended) and also in the Report of the HRC (2018). We believe that these kinds of disparities in the HE sector are likely to be a national problem.

In our endeavours to tackle these kinds of problems the university has provided a range of interventions aimed at capacitating all academics in the university who require this – including mentoring, inhouse, national and international training and dedicated time off campus for academics to conduct research and complete PhDs.

Moreover, the university has embarked on a consultative process engaging academics and the various stakeholder groups in the university as we believe that these conversations are essential in universities in their quest for transformation.

In the process a number of opinions and documents have emerged from a range of stakeholders in the university, including organised labour and the colleges. As the process of consultations continue, and submissions continue to be presented to management we believe that this has created confusion within the university and in the public domain via the media. While the currently in force University *Guidelines for the Minimum Criteria for Promotion of Academic Employees* (as approved by Senex in July 2018) are currently being interrogated we wish to stress that the university's promotion criteria of Senex, July 2018, are *quantitative* guidelines and thus do not guarantee promotion, but set the framework for shortlisting candidates.

Qualitative aspects are as important in determining the candidate's readiness for promotion and are probed through the evaluation of required statements, evidence-based portfolios, reflections, presentations and other evidence and documents. These are considered by the selection panel and are probed during the interviews following the shortlisting of candidates who adequately meet the specified requirements and criteria.

As a comprehensive university with very high staff: student ratios and unprecedented student numbers, it is important to note that our teaching and learning criteria also play a very important role because each lecturer has thousands of students to teach. Let us also remember that our lecturers produce study guides and we need to appreciate that, by the way, in our study guides you come across the reality that



helps you to appreciate the fact that every word that is taught is written and subjected to rigorous quality and peer reviewing, more so since all our teaching materials are in the public domain and subject to academic and other scrutiny. Thus, the research and review that undergirds all our teaching material cannot be discounted.

With regard to the teaching and learning criteria, candidates must submit an evidence-based teaching reflection statement based on the last two to three-year's achievements. Candidates are required to submit a portfolio of evidence (including teaching materials developed) a week prior to the Selection Committee meeting demonstrating and providing evidence of their teaching and learning and community engagement in terms of their experience in teaching and learning with regard to:

- i Evidence of, and approach, to ODeL.
- ii Evidence of fostering a learner-centred approach and ODeL pedagogy.
- iii Involvement in developing study material.
- iv Evidence of, and approach, to Curriculum Transformation
- v Evidence of, and approach, to learner support within an ODeL context
- vi The extent to which the candidate has used a virtual learning platform (VLE e.g. *myUnisa*).
- vii Pass, success and throughput rates in the modules the candidate has taught and methods to improve these rates within the last two to three years.
- viii Peer and student evaluations.
- ix Approach to postgraduate supervision
- x Proof of registration for or completed an assessor-training course
- xi Evidence of training in ODeL teaching and learning.

Similarly, applicants are required to submit a research portfolio of evidence of published articles in accredited journals, scholarly books and book chapters, conference proceedings, and supervision of post graduates is required. In order to accommodate the diversity across disciplines and colleges, Selection Committees are required to qualitatively evaluate the research portfolio.

Lastly, we want to draw attention to the fact that the university's promotion criteria do not refer to numbers of articles or publications but rather numbers of research output units. This means for example that the research output points for journal articles are proportionally divided among the numbers of co-authors. We are aware that this form of "counting" of research outputs differs across universities. This means that there cannot be any promotions in the absence of publications.

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